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The Study of Relationship between Distributed Leadership and Principals' Self-Efficacy in High Schools of Iran

Moslem Maleki Hasanvand
M.A in Educational Administration, Kharazmi University, Iran
Email: shomami85@yahoo.com

Hassan Reza Zeinabadi
Assistance Professor in Educational Administration, Kharazmi University, Iran
Email: hzeinabadi@yahoo.com.

Mostafa Azizi Shomami
Ph.D. student in Educational Administration, Kharazmi University, Iran

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Abstract

This research was conducted with purpose of studying the relationship between distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy in high schools of Iran. Statistical population included all principal of high-school in Tehran for academic year 2012 (418 people). A number of 200 principal were selected via cluster random sampling method using Morgan table. A researchers' designed questionnaire was used to collect data about distributed leadership and for measuring the principals' self-efficacy, Lee and Bertera (2007) 12-item questionnaire to measure the variables including Knowledge, Self-awareness, Critical thinking and Emotional comfort. Data was analyzed by use of central tendency measures and Regression through SPSS software. Findings are as follows: Correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy (R=0.343); distributed leadership and principals' Knowledge (R=0.159); distributed leadership and principals' Critical thinking (R=0.164); distributed leadership and principals' Emotional comfort (R=0.342) in level 0.05, is significant. Also correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' Self-awareness (R=0.139) in level 0.05, is not significant.

Key words: Distributed Leadership; Principals; Self-Efficacy

Introduction

Leaders significantly impact overall organizational performance (Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008). Leadership, organizational performance, and leader effectiveness have tangential connections. In spite of a plethora of research on the need for teacher leadership, the effectiveness of principals' distributing leadership to teachers is scant, and the topic needs further investigation. There is limited empirical research examining distributive leadership and leadership effectiveness. Because many district, state, and school policies encourage principals

to use the concept of distributing leadership, more research is needed concerning leadership effectiveness and distributed leadership.

Versus the background of knowledge-based society, a successful school is no longer an alone kingdom ruled by a single heroic principal (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2008). Instead, collective wisdoms and shared responsibilities are the key elements contributing to the school's sustainable development. According to the scholars, one source of the collective wisdom is teachers' professional initiatives. In other words, a successful school relies on teachers' teaching capacity as well as their contribution to the school leadership. (Leithwood & Mascall, 2008; Murphy, 2005; Copland, 2003; Donaldson, 2001; Spillane, Diamond & Jita, 2000) Jackson (2004) is seen distributed leadership as a valuable instrument of school improvement. The strengths of distributed leadership are based on its flexibility and adaptability.

According to Yukl (2008), school principals, and all other business leaders, must be equipped to modify leadership behaviors, strategies, and prescribed programs to meet challenges for increasingly tumultuous organizations. Effective school principals play an active role in the organizational and instructional processes of schools by taking the lead in changing the positional power of the principal, and the distribution of power among the administrative team and teacher leaders (DeMoss, 2002; Mulford & Moreno, 2006).

In defining leadership as 'influence,' Lashway (2006) concluded that everyone in an organization has at least some influence, suggesting that principals as leaders must rely on others to some degree in an organization in order to actually lead. Lashway (2006) suggests that a principals' primary influence in the organization was to distribute leadership throughout traditionally hierarchical levels within schools. The influence of all individuals in a coherent direction is necessary to create the level of success demanded in today's schools.

Earlier studies have shown a positive correlation between school empowerment and teachers' professionalism (Boglera & Somech, 2004). Therefore, school leaders are consciously seeking for the more effective ways to increase teachers' intrinsic motivation. In addition to that, there also exists a positive correlation between distributed leadership and teachers' self-efficacy in western schools (Spillane, 2005; Gronn, 2002; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001).

According to researchers, a number of benefits are derived from the use of distributed leadership by principals in K-12 schools (Harris, 2005 & 2008; Mascall & et al, 2008). One organizational benefit of distributed leadership may simply follow the old adage "two heads are better than one." Indeed, the combined capacities of more members can capitalize on a range of individual strengths as a collective and the organization can also become more interdependent. Increased participation in decision making from more members will generally lead to greater commitment to organizational goals and strategies (Leithwood et al., 2009). Lastly, organizations enjoy an increase in overall individual determination that improves members' experience of work (Leithwood et al., 2009). Gronn (2008), reflecting back on the development of distributive leadership, preferred its application for positive organizational outcomes for quality decisions with commitment because more people are contributing to the decisions. Staffs in schools often feel entitled to contribute to decisions about school developments that affect their work efforts. Collaboration for the purpose of school excellence through distributive leadership mechanisms spread leadership among teachers and staff in schools (Wallace, 2001).

Distributed leadership

In the traditional leadership model, power flows from top to down through a hierarchical ladder. A successful leader is often labeled as a charismatic and heroic role model. (Spillane, 2005) Transformational leadership has become a popular theme, which emphasizes an encouraging, harmonious, and ethical leadership tie within the organization (Bass, 1998; Bass

& Avolio, 1994). However, both the traditional leadership model and the transformational approach focus on the "leader" per se (Leithwood & Jantzi, 1990). Leaders' inborn traits and acquired skills have been widely studied in numerous studies (Northouse, 2007).

Distributive leadership primarily implies a social distribution where a leader's power of decision-making is dispersed to all members of the school who are then viewed as a collaboration of leaders (Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004). Distributive leadership implies interdependency rather than single leader dependency by leaders sharing responsibility with subordinates (Harris, 2003). In a sense, subordinate positions dissipate in distributive leadership as leadership is shared among many individuals in the organization.

Teacher leadership is promotes the idea that members of the organization can share leadership activities (Harris, 2003). Gronn's (2000) viewed leadership as a stream of influence rather than an explicit connection with a single leader. In a distributive environment, a larger number of constituents in the organization have a stake in the accomplishments of the school (Harris, 2003). Nevertheless, distributed leadership provides us a new lens to observe the leader follower relationship (Spillane, 2005; Woods, 2004). Distributed leadership is built upon the participants' contributions to the participatory decision making. Research focused on distributed leadership has weathered an initial stage of conceptual exploration and now it goes into an empirical test phase (Gronn, 2008).

Distributed leadership provides a new lens to observe leadership practice. "Empowerment", "interaction", "democratic environment" and "shared responsibility" are the most expressed words mentioned in various definitions (Hartley, 2007; Scribner, Sawyer, Watson & Myers, 2007; Firestone, Mangin, Martinez, & Polovsky, 2005; Harris, 2005; Spillane, Dimond,& Jita, 2000).

Some researchers perceive distributed leadership as an overlapping concept with "shared leadership" and "teacher leadership", because they all emphasize the power delegation, internal interaction, as well as teachers' dynamics and professionalism (Hartley, 2007; Sheard, 2007; Duignan & Bezzina, 2006;Murphy, 2005). Nevertheless, other scholars like Spillane (2006) and Harris (2005) insist a clear boundary to compartmentalize distributed leadership from other relevant concepts. They argue that distributed leadership is a theory following the practice (Spillane, 2006; Harris, 2005). It goes beyond the power delegation within the school structure. More precisely, distributed leadership is a whole process concerning the internal communication, decision-making, tasks allocation, evaluation and so on. Therefore, scholars need a holistic view to perceive how schools operate, what people do and why (Archer, 2004). Furthermore, Spillane and his colleagues (Spillane, et. al, 2001) believe that school leadership is contextually bounded and not intrinsically correct. There is no universal model to distinguish the good practice from the bad practice. Therefore, it is a big challenge for the principals to use leadership wisely and properly as they take macro and micro environments into account. To sum up, the biggest difference between distributed leadership and other relevant concepts such as teacher leadership and shared leadership is that the leadership practice is based on the situation instead of the people (Harris, 2005; Spillane, et. al, 2001).

Distributed leadership takes place in an inclusive and complex school environment. Leadership practice is in the center and the roles of leaders and followers can be shifted according to the different situations. The basic assumption of this definition is to see leadership as a shared function. Power is not a zero-sum commodity; instead, it can be expanded through delegation. (Blasé & Blasé, 2004; Jackson, 2004) Furthermore, the Complexity Theory (also known as the Chaos Theory) raises another important question: If the organizational structure develops from parts-whole relations into more complex phenomena, how would leadership react to such kind of complexity? (Kiel & Elliott, 1997) One possible answer is we need more self-managing teams that exercise distributed leadership. It is notable that the idea of distributed leadership discussed in this study does not necessarily have to be democratic. The roles of leaders and

followers are emergent in certain situations when specialty and expertise are needed. The goal of this framework is to expand the space, increase the opportunities, as well as enhance the capabilities amongst all the people in the organization (Jackson, 2004).

As one of the key concepts of the study, distributed leadership unfolds the following characteristics: Interaction: Leadership comes from the interactions among the organizational members, rather than individual behaviors. Wholeness: The scope of leadership extends beyond the positions. School administrators, teachers, students, parents, and other communities can all be the leaders. (Bennett, Wise, Woods & Harvey, 2003) Institutionalization: Distributed leadership includes all forms of collaboration and participation within the school. It is integrated into the school culture and daily routines. (Gronn, 2002) Fluidity: The boundaries between the leader and followers are blurred. Leadership does not reside in formal positions or specific roles, but emerges from the practice (Spillane, 2006; Bennett, et. al., 2003).

Principals' self-efficacy

Because the principal is the 'key educational leader' and has the most opportunity to exercise leadership, it seems important to define leadership effectiveness and note attributes that may affect a principals' capacity to lead. Invariably, personal traits contribute to leadership effectiveness. Effective leaders can be defined as "those persons, occupying various roles in the school, who work with others to provide direction and who exert influence on persons and things in order to achieve the school's goals" (Leithwood & Riehl, 2003, p. 9). In other words, effective principals facilitate effective schools for teachers and ultimately student's success. Furthermore, Leithwood and his colleagues (2008,) claimed that "school leadership is second only to the classroom teaching as an influence" (p. 27) on schools and learning.

A considerable amount of literature has been published on self-efficacy. Bandura (1994, p. 71) defines self-efficacy as "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives." In an educational context, this means principals' confidence and belief about his or her capabilities to educate students by improving their learning performance and socialization level.

Self-efficacy is vital to principals' success, because it determines the degree of effort exerted on a particular task as well as the kinds of aspirations and goals that principals will set for them-selves (Bandura, 1986; Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Bandura (2000) promotes the importance of self-efficacy in leadership situations by stating, "When faced with obstacles or setbacks…those with a strong belief in their capabilities will redouble their efforts to master the challenge" (p.120). Even though principal self-efficacy seems to be a promising construct for understanding principal motivation and behavior, it has been relatively unstudied (Tschannen- Moran & Gareis, 2005, p.3). In establishing a framework for the purposeful inclusion of interactions and experiences that develop principal self-efficacy within preparation programs, it is important to first understand the history and development of the theory of self-efficacy.

Bandura (1986, 1997) found that these beliefs and judgments about personal capabilities, rather than their actual abilities drive people to accomplishing goals they set for themselves. The stronger their self-efficacy, the more vigorous and persistent are people's efforts (p. 394). Bandura made clear that more important than skills alone is the judgment of what a person can do with the skills he or she possesses. "It is when one is applying skills that high efficacy intensifies and sustains the effort needed to realize a difficult performance" (p.394).

Perceptions of self-efficacy can be either positive and empower people to action, or can be negative, and cause people doubt, resulting in inaction. Those individuals with high levels of self-efficacy about a given task will undoubtedly perform better than those without such

beliefs. Those people who are lacking in self-efficacy regarding specific tasks often will not even attempt those tasks. Pajares (1996) illustrates this phenomenon through the example of language arts students whose grades are based primarily on writing assignments. Those who excel in composition will feel confident in their ability to earn good grades while those students who struggle in the writing process will feel demoralized in their pursuit of higher grades.

Bandura (1986) refers to four sources of self-efficacy. The most influential source is that of mastery experiences. Completing a task well builds successful experience, which in turn is necessary to create further successes. "Repeated successes raise self-efficacy appraisal; repeated failures lower them" (Bandura, 1986, p. 399). Failures that are overcome by robust efforts also raise self-efficacy and cause the person to believe that greater effort can overcome almost any obstacle. The second source takes into consideration the modeling aspect of social cognition. As people observe and learn from others, they vicariously experience events. If the other person completing the task (event) is judged to be of similar competence, the vicarious learner makes a mental note about his/her own competence based on the success or failure of the first person. Bandura explained the power of vicarious experiences thusly:

> Although vicarious experiences are generally weaker than direct ones, vicarious forms can produce significant, enduring changes through their effects on performance. People convinced vicariously of their inefficacy are inclined to behave in ineffectual ways that, in fact, generate confirmatory behavioral evidence of inability. Conversely, modeling influences that enhance perceived self-efficacy can weaken the impact of direct experiences of failure by sustaining performances in the face of repeated failure. A given mode of influence can thus set in motion processes that augment its effects or diminish the effects of otherwise powerful influences" (1986, p. 400).

The third source for self-efficacy development is social persuasion in the form of feedback from another person about a specific capability. When genuine feedback from others who possess skills or expertise in the particular area in question is positive, performance can be enhanced. However, if social persuasions are negative, performances that were once adequate can suffer (p. 400). The final self-efficacy source occurs as people monitor their somatic and emotional states with regard to a specific task. If the thought of completing the task makes one ill at ease or nervous, self-efficacy suffers.

Bandura suggests, "People read their somatic arousal in stressful or taxing situations as ominous signs of vulnerability to dysfunction" (p. 401). Conversely, when people welcome the challenge of a particular task, their self-efficacy heightens as does their corresponding performance of that task.

Efficacious beliefs have been shown to influence how much effort people will devote to a task, and how long they will persist in the face of challenging circumstances (Bandura, 1997). Efficacy beliefs also affect the cognitive mechanisms that drive behavior. Self-efficacy can impact performance by influencing the goals people set for themselves. Bandura (1986) found that individuals with high self-efficacy set higher performance goals, and then develop and more skillfully enact effective task strategies than those low in self-efficacy. McCormick (2001) agrees that self-efficacy beliefs affect the development of functional strategies and the skillful execution of those strategies.

This reinforces the idea that not only must leaders know what goals they need to accomplish, but also how to utilize people and processes to actually accomplish goals. McCormick goes on to say that "successful leadership uses social influence processes to organize, direct and motivate the actions of others. It requires persistent task-directed effort, effective task strategies and the artful application of various conceptual, technical, and interpersonal skills (p. 28).

Methodology

This paper as respect to its nature and subject has been applied through descriptive-survey method. Statistical population for this research included all principal of high-school in Tehran for academic year 2012(418 people). A number of 200 principal were selected via cluster random sampling method using Morgan table.

In this research for measuring the distributed leadership, 20-item questionnaire was used. For measuring the principals' self-efficacy, Lee and Bertera (2007) 12-item questionnaire to measure the variables including Knowledge, Self-awareness, Critical thinking and Emotional comfort. The validity of the above tools have been examined and confirmed by some of professors of Kharazmi University. For calculating the reliability of the tools, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was applied and for distributed leadership equaled to 0.77 and for principals' self-efficacy equaled to 0.80. Data was analyzed by use of correlation through SPSS software

Findings

Table 1- correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy

correlation	R
distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy	.343**

Notes: n = 200, *p = 0.05; * *p = 0.01

Considering the above table in relation to the correlation coefficient, correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy (R=0.343) in level 0.05, is significant.

Table 2- correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy dimension

correlation	R
distributed leadership and principals' Knowledge	.159*
distributed leadership and principals' Self-awareness	.139
distributed leadership and principals' Critical thinking	.164*
distributed leadership and principals' Emotional comfort	.342**

Notes: n = 200, *p = 0.05; * *p = 0.01

Considering the above table in relation to the correlation coefficient, correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' Knowledge (R=0.159), correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' Critical thinking (R=0.164) and correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' Emotional comfort (R=0.342) in level 0.05, is significant. Also correlation coefficient between distributed leadership and principals' Self-awareness (R=0.139) in level 0.05, is not significant.

Conclusion

The challenge of improving organizational performance has led to the study of alterable variables that leaders can shape in order to make a difference in performance (Campbell et al., 1993; Kaiser et al., 2008; Steers, 1975). Although effective organizations appear to share similarities (Kotter & Heskett, 1992; Marcoulides & Heck, 1993; Nonaka & Toyama, 2002; Podsakoff et al., 1993).

This research looks into the distributed leadership and principals' self-efficacy relation in high school principals. As the studies showed, the distributed leadership emerges from the daily

practice in various forms. The school principals used different empowerment strategies to delegate the responsibilities among the teachers in certain situations (Spillane, 2006; Gronn, 2000).

Self-efficacy is as factors affecting morale and psychological conditions of individual principals. Results show that direct significant relationship between Using distributed approach and an improved sense of principals' self-efficacy. It seems, principals who are leading the way in the distribution, assessed their Knowledge and skills at a higher level and More willing to use others experience and knowledge. Also Using distributed approach Causing, principals have a more attention to the consequences of their behavior.

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